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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [OSCE](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN DFM KARASIN'S REPLY TO LETTER FROM U/S  
BURNS ON SOUTH OSSETIA

REF: A) STATE 80906 B) MOSCOW 5458 C) MOSCOW 5375

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Kirk Augustine.  
Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) The Russian MFA on May 25 passed to us without comment a written reply from DFM Grigoriy Karasin to the May 19 letter U/S Burns sent him on South Ossetia (Ref A). The letter echoes the principal arguments Karasin made during his May 23 conversation with the Ambassador (Ref B). We understand from the MFA that the text of the letter will also be delivered through the Russian Embassy in Washington. An unofficial Embassy translation follows in para 2.

¶2. (C) Begin text:

Dear Nicholas,

Thank you for your communication of 19 May, in which you share your concerns with regard to the state of affairs in the Georgian-Ossetian resolution and the role of Russia in that process.

On the whole, our goals and approaches coincide in the desire to facilitate the creation of conditions that would secure a peaceful, non-violent resolution of conflict situations and prevent new bloodshed in the Transcaucasus. Toward that end we are prepared for constructive cooperation with all partners, including the United States.

I think it unfortunate that, as one may infer from your letter, there is a tendency in Washington to rely on assessments based on one-sided and often distorted information. It appears that in the State Department a quite influential lobby is making itself felt, at whose instigation an algorithm of actions aimed at the unambiguous -- and uncritical -- support of "its people" in Tbilisi is taking shape.

I will not get into polemics on the whole list of charges brought up in your message, as that would require a more thorough discussion. I want, however, to make some comments.

Assistance to South Ossetia in the socio-economic sphere by the North Ossetian region is in complete conformity with the Russian-Georgian Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation and Reconstruction of the Economy in the Zone of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict and Return of Refugees of 23 December 2000.

It (the Agreement) provides specifically that Russia and Georgia will support the initiative of administrative-territorial institutions, enterprises and organizations to assist the South Ossetian side.

The rebuke with regard to the participation of Russian citizens in the government of South Ossetia is, in my view,

groundless. Russian citizens have the right to work where they desire as, incidentally, do citizens of other democratic states, including the U.S.A.

Our people would not understand the Government of Russia, if it -- in the era of democracy -- dictated to citizens where to live and work. One would think that a similar ban on the part of our partners in the West would justifiably be subject to criticism. As far as I know, many members of the South Ossetian government who came from Russia possess in one way or another roots or kinship relations with the Ossetian people who, by the way, do not divide themselves along geographical lines.

Residents of South Ossetia are in fact acquiring Russian citizenship and, accordingly, document themselves with Russian passports. However, this process did not begin only recently, but rather immediately after the withdrawal of Georgia from the USSR, i.e., fifteen years ago. Moreover, many South Ossetians acquired Russian citizenship during the military phase of the conflict between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. I would stress that the acquisition by residents

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of South Ossetia of Russian citizenship took place and is taking place in strict accordance with relevant Russian legislation.

It struck me as somewhat strange that the letter contained no recognition of the clear progress that has been achieved in recent months on a Georgian-Ossetian resolution. I have in mind above all the significant results of the two recent sessions of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) in Vladikavkaz and Tskhinvali (incidentally, you also did not favor the JCC itself with a mention).

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We evaluate the work of the Commission positively, and that evaluation is shared by Georgia, the OSCE and EU. In particular, it is a positive sign that in Tskhinvali working groups of the JCC were formed for the elaboration of a joint program of action to resolve the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, and a list of projects was agreed for the socio-economic rehabilitation of the zone of conflict, which will be presented for consideration at the Donors' Conference in Brussels.

Incidentally, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the Georgian side stubbornly refuses to adopt, jointly with the South Ossetian side, a declaration in which might be fixed mutual security guarantees and obligations on the non-use of force (the initiative for such a document was, as is well known, promoted by the OSCE). I am convinced that such a declaration, signed at a high level, would be an important confidence-building factor between the sides, and would facilitate the creation of the psychological and political context necessary for real progress in a resolution. I suppose that our colleagues in Washington might wish to recommend to their Georgian partners a more constructive and flexible approach to this issue.

Such a document on the non-renewal of hostilities is highly relevant and applicable to the Georgian-Abkhazia resolution, where we have also noticed positive steps as a result of the session of the Coordinating Council held on May 15. Apropos of the potential for Russian-American cooperation on the problems of the conflicts in the Transcaucasus, the unity of our approaches is symbolized in the issue of the prospect for prolonging the mandate of the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Georgia H(eidi) Tagliavini.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the following. We are convinced that Russia and the U.S.A. are capable of joint efforts to make a substantial contribution to reinforce peace, stability and security in the Transcaucasus. However,

we must act in that direction in conditions of positive mutual understanding, and not through mutual rebukes and a negative tone. As you may be able to imagine, we, too, have our own issues with the United States and its not entirely impartial policies in the region (for example, Washington is hardly unaware of deliveries of weapons to Georgia by some of its NATO allies).

With regard to the agenda of the G8, I would like to say that as far as I am aware, there are no plans to touch in this format on issues of Transcaucasian conflicts with the exception of Nagorno-Karabakh. In that regard I was extremely surprised that this question was raised in your letter.

I think, Nicholas, that we have accumulated enough themes for a detailed discussion in Moscow in early June. Let us resolve to seek mutually agreeable approaches based on objectivity and taking each other's interests into account.

With respect

/s/

[S](#)G. Karasin

End text.

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